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*Devil's Mirage*

Looking at the symbolism of patterns and color throughout history and religion, I have created a whimsical performance of dancers, sculptural installation, and painting coming together to create illusions in space and form called the *Devil's Mirage*. The female body plays a large role in the design of the pattern thus asking questions about a woman's body and about femininity. Simply by thinking about perception in space and combining real with its counterpart imitation, *Devil's Mirage* becomes a virtual reality for the viewer to look upon without the use of electronics. It operates as a space of contradictions that expand the meaning of the entire piece.

The idea for the Devil's Mirage was started in the Spring of 2017 and now in Spring of 2018 I realize how my project has changed - or rather my ideas on the project have changed. In my previous writings, I called the project, *Mother's Mirage*, as I was strictly thinking about the space solely as a reference to mother nature and a woman's body. However, after a year of thinking and working on this project, I found there are more aspects to my project.. While the *Devil's Mirage* still references the movement of water, sky and even topographic maps, it also has additional symbolism conveyed through pattern and color.

Set in an endless white space created by a cyclorama, *Devil's Mirage* stands out with its unique pattern of light and shadow. Made up of three sculptures of installation foam, as large as 4'x3'x3', and nine organic shaped canvases, stripes are painted on and across each surface. Each piece is inspired by parts of the body, specifically female. Using images I had taken of a previous Ohio State University dancer, who was covered from head to toe in blue body paint stripes, I was able to view the contour lines of the body and clearly view the surface of her anatomy to create

shapes that were partly figurative. Finding the contour lines just as important as the shape of the body, I kept the lines as part of both the sculptures and canvases. Covering them in the contour lines and continuing the light and shadow of the human forms into every part of each piece created an artificial movement and presence. By coming from a woman's body, each of the sculptures and canvases become their own artificial, genderfluid body and ask the question, "what does it mean to look and be feminine?"

The contour lines create the striped pattern which bring its own undertones to the *Devil's Mirage*. Stripes are heavily weighted with past and present symbolism. In the medieval times stripes were associated with the demonic. Images of the devil and those seen as witches wearing striped clothing were common. In fact, at this point in time, you could actually be killed just for wearing stripes. According to Michel Pastoureau, the author of the book *The Devil's Cloth: A History of Stripes*, this was because the pattern of stripes made it difficult to tell the foreground from the background and was believed to be a sort of evil trickery (Pastoureau). The negative correlation with the pattern continued after the medieval period, however, they were simply an affiliation with the deviant in society and the consequences were minor in comparison to its past. For instance, inmates were forced to wear jumpsuits displaying a pattern of stripes. This was partly because of the already existing connotation of the evil behind the pattern and also the idea that the inmates could easily be spotted if they escaped. This idea of standing out eventually carried over to sailors who would wear blue striped shirts to enable them to be seen quickly if tossed overboard. Interestingly, the pattern was also used to *camouflage* warships with the same pattern and color. Despite its previous uses, in 1917 stripes became a female fashion statement in Gabrielle's Coco Chanel collection (Lidbury). Up to this point, women did not wear stripes,

besides the “witches” in the medieval time, not even female inmates. Due to this stripes were seen as edgy and a feminist declaration on a woman. For this reason, *Devil’s Mirage* is made up of a striped female body that continues into the performance part of the piece.

With blue stripes already having a history with sailors and warships - the pigment was an easy choice. The only other question was what kind of blue needed to be used to further the contradictions working in the piece. Painted in a bright cerulean blue, meaning “heavenly”, the stripes were carried across the surface of each part of the *Devil’s Mirage*. Not only does this specific pigment of blue relate to the blue stripes that signified water in the sailor’s clothing and on the warships, but it also contradicts the idea of stripes being a symbol for the deviant. *Devil’s Mirage* is a space that becomes a devil dressed as an angel of light, further confusing its viewers as to what is real.

By viewing the Devil’s Mirage from the front, the viewer perceives a virtual space. The word virtual comes from the word virtue expressing that the virtual is something that has certain virtues or qualities that gives it the appearance of the real thing it is mimicking (“Virtual”). Often painters would accomplish something virtual by using trompe l’oeil meaning to “fool the eye”. With this illusionistic technique, they were able to paint flat surfaces that could be perceived as intimidating, shallow space. This same concept that was used long ago in places such as Pompeii, was used to create the illusions on the three sculptures and the nine canvases. However, I made a white cyclorama for the backdrop of the space *because* of its lack of contour or perspective lines. This creates the illusion of an empty white space that continues farther back than the wall it rests upon. Viewed from the sides of the *Devil’s Mirage*, you can see that it is a false space, but if seen directly in front, it looks as though its parts are “copied and pasted” into a

blank white screen of a computer. By using both of these techniques, I was able to create a virtual space of an environment that does not actually exist.

In addition to the artificial sculptural creations and paintings, the performance of the *Devil's Mirage* provides realism to the project thus contributing to the contradictions and illusions that is the mirage. Consisting of three dancers, including myself, all dressed in blue stripes, we move slowly throughout the space, blending in with our surroundings. Working with Ohio State dance major, Iman Clark, and dance minor, Kat Johnson, I guided each dancer in what I was looking for in the performance of the piece. Kayla Gifford and Cameron Lattimer, assisted me in painting the blue stripes on to the two dancers and also managed the recording of the performance with two cameras. As for myself, I wore a costume that I designed and crafted with custom made fabric displaying the same design as my sculptures in the *Devil's Mirage*.

The *Devil's Mirage* is a meditative space and because of its detail and illusion, it calls for the viewer to slow down. To further influence the viewer to pause, the movement of the performance is also reduced in speed. This allows a direct correlation to the environment and the dancers, in which one is not more important than the other. I lead the dancers into flowing in and through the space and its objects, moving at an extremely slow pace, as to cause the audience to question whether they were actually moving. At times each performer seemed to be more sculptural than human, and the sculptures appearing more like bodies. My camera crew was also directed, but with different instructions. I asked for specific angles with camera movement and zoom in order to heighten the slowness of the performance and to capture the entirety of the space. With the documentation of the performance I created an eleven minute video that is

played on a loop near the *Devil's Mirage* installation. Together, in the space, we blurred the lines between reality and fantasy, animate and inanimate form.

### Bibliography

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